

HISTORY OF THE KNIGHT

By Frank Passic, EDITOR

The Knight, the official publication of the Lithuanian Numismatic Association, was published from June-July 1978 (Volume 1, Issue No. 1) through January-February 2010 (Volume 32 No. 3). There were a total of 169 issues of this numismatic specialty publication. The following article is reprinted from the Summer-Fall 1988 (Volume 11, Nos. 1 & 2) issue, with updates and a conclusion at the end.

How does one start a numismatic organization and keep it going for ten full years? This is the tenth anniversary of the Lithuanian Numismatic Association, and for the benefit of our newer readers, and as a reminder for our charter members, this is the story about how the LNA was formed and our accomplishments over the past ten years:

I had been a coin collector most of my life, and active in my local Albion, Michigan coin club. In September, 1977 at an ethnic festival in Jackson, Michigan. I noticed a Lithuanian booth, sponsored by Arunas & Virginia Udrys (Virginia's father is Al Ruzgas, a well-known Lithuanian collector and LNA member who lives in New York). At their booth was a publication, **Bridges**, which gave fascinating information (in English) about Lithuania and Lithuanians.

I might add at this point that my Lithuanian heritage is on my mother's side. My grandparents, Nikodimas and Theodora (Barvidaite) Kulikauskas, came to America and settled in Chicago around 1911-12. My grandfather was born in Nevardenai just south of Varniai, while my grandmother was born at Deguciai Manor just north of Luoke, south of Telsiai. My grandfather emigrated to America in August 1911, and my grandmother the following year. Setting in Chicago, Illinois, they were married in January, 1914 at the Providence of God Church by the Rev. Krusas, a well-known Lithuanian priest. In 1918 they moved to Albion, Michigan, where I am from (I was born in 1953).

Back to my story. With the experience at the ethnic festival still fresh in my memory, the next weekend was our local Albion Coin Club show, of which I was the chairman. At this show, dealer Hascall Pierce has two Y-9 1936 1 Centas coins in UNC for sale at \$6 each. I purchased them as a reminder of my Lithuanian heritage. These small coins were so innocent, so tiny... Well, since I had that one denomination, it meant that I had to get the rest of them, too (\$\$\$\$), didn't it?

In order to exhibit these Lithuanian coins, you have to know something about them in order to properly prepare the exhibit. No one knew anything. Then I remembered reading in **Bridges** that there was a Lithuanian Museum in Chicago. A 3 1/2 hour drive away, upon arriving there, I was fascinated by the exhibits, and discovered in the gift shop a book about Lithuanian

money entitled, "Nepriklausomos....." (whatever that meant). Thumbing through it, I must have bugged the Librarian, Jurgis, for a whole hour asking him to translate key portions, as I wrote down every word on hastily found scratch paper. The more I learned, the more interesting it got, and I certainly wanted to learn more!

In January, 1978, I wrote to **World Coin News** to express my excitement about Lithuanian numismatics. After my letter was published in the "Letters to the Editor," soon other letters began appearing from other Lithuanian collectors. One thought he was the only one who collected Lithuania! After several letters appeared, the editor of **WCN** made the remark, "...the rallying cry for a Lithuanian Numismatic Association?", and that did it. We simply **had** to form the LNA!

Soon we all began writing each other, sharing information, according to the bits and pieces we knew. At this point we decided to form the LNA. Our first issue of **The Knight** appeared June-July 1978, 4 pages (2 sheets), 14 inches long. It was an instant "rallying cry" for Baltic collectors, and we soon had 100 charter members. As information poured in, we soon expanded to 6 pages. Then with the June-July 1979 (Vol. 2 No. 1) issue, we settled on our permanent format, 8 pages, 11 inch long paper.

It is amusing to recall one particular letter we received at the time, from someone who wondered how an entire numismatic organization could be formed around only 14 coins (the Y-1-14 1925-1936-1938 dated coins of the Republic of Lithuania). Yes, there was much people needed to know, including US!

We, too, were "green" at what we were doing, but together we were able to share information with one another, pool our resources, and come out with very interesting issues of **The Knight**, covering all aspects of Lithuanian numismatics.

From almost the very beginning, we gained an important member, Val Matelis, whose translation abilities and familiarity with Lithuanian history have been an extreme asset to us. Member John Glynn from England has been a tremendous help with supplying us information and research material.

Our first major project was the translating into the English language of the book, **Nepriklausomos Lietuvos Pinigai**, (Independent Lithuanian Money) by Jonas K. Karys (1953). The translation began in serial form beginning with the October-November 1978 issue, and continued until April-May 1980.

While this was going on, I volunteered myself as the numismatic curator at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago. Soon a wealth of un-cataloged material was discovered, mostly from the estate of the late Lithuanian numismatist and physician, Dr. Aleksandras Rackus. Each box was a discovery in itself! The museum then financed the issuance of our custom-made Capital Plastic Lithuanian coin holders, to house the 14 coin circulation set.

This was announced in our April-May 1979 issue. The 100 holders soon sold out, and since that time another 200 have been made, making 300 total. They are still sold through the Museum today.

With all this excitement going on, we held our first LNA meeting December 10, 1978, at the New York International Numismatic Convention, with members Vince Alones and Robert Douchis as master of ceremonies. Dealer Karl Stephens and writer Dave Alexander were our first speakers. At the weekend convention, we passed out special Lithuanian coin trends (December-January 1978-79 issue). Our second meeting was held March 25, 1979 at the Chicago International Coin Fair, with myself in charge. Speakers were Stanley Balzekas, Jr., and Jonas Z. Augustinius. Our next meeting was held a year later at the 1980 CICF on June 1, with our fourth meeting being held on March 15, 1981 at the CICF. In April 1982 we joined the American Numismatic Association, and held our fifth meeting at the ANA Convention in Boston, with Vince Alones presenting a slide show about Lithuanian banknotes, in which over 35 persons attended. We soon thereafter held our sixth meeting at the New York International show on December 11, 1982. Vince has headed the N.Y. LNA meetings each year and is an integral part of the LNA.

Another big LNA meeting was held in Detroit on July 28, 1984 at the ANA Convention. Yours truly, along with Vince Alones, providing the program. I also was able to be a speaker at the "Numismatic Theatre" that same day.

Starting with the October-November 1980 issue, we began our second major project, the translation of Jonas K. Karys' **Ancient Lithuanian Currencies**. This monumental project, translated by Val Matelis, continued in serial form until August-September 1982.

We are an active numismatic group, and have had a remarkable effect on world numismatic literature as it concerns Lithuania. One big controversy developed in August 1981, when Krause publication's **Standard Catalog of World Coins** removed Lithuania from the natural "L" section and placed it under "USSR". Our protest of that move generated numerous protest letters to Krause publications. One even came from the noted paper money expert Albert Pick, who insisted that Lithuania remain under the "L's" in his paper money catalog. In May, 1984, Krause publications reversed its policy, and placed the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) under the "B's" in a geographic Baltic Region category.

Beginning with the April-May 1981 issue and in sporadic issues since then, Vince Alones and Henry L. Gaidis have been presenting a series of articles on Lithuanian military orders, medals, and decorations. This series has attracted a lot of interest for this virgin field.

Our February-March 1983 issue featured a special insert entitled, **A Catalog of Early Lithuanian Coins I. Under The Dukes.**, which was soon followed by part II, **Under the Kings**. The classic work, **The Coin Hoards of Alunoa-Skleriai, and Kruminiai, Lithuania**, by numismatist Povilas Karazija was translated in English and made available to LNA members for

\$15, which covered our costs of Xeroxing it, and was announced in the August-September 1983 issue.

A sad event occurred in 1984, when we learned of the death of Lithuanian mint director Jonas K. Karys, who died on March 26, 1984. This was announced in the April-May, 1984 issue.

In January, 1986, the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago moved to a new location, and with it, yours truly was able to assemble a Lithuanian numismatic room, filled with items from Lithuania's numismatic history. Every LNA member should make an attempt to visit the Museum and see this exhibit and collection.

Our LNA members have been generous over the years in helping us. We purchased a camera with a macro-lens that takes photographs of photographs. This has helped yours truly immensely in being able to provide photographs of Lithuanian coins!

In 1987, the LNA graciously purchased yours truly a new typewriter, replacing the old one I had been using for nearly 10 years and which had worn out. This has improved the look of **The Knight** and has enabled our publication to look more professional. [NOTE: The aforementioned items were replaced with the digital and computer age several years later].

Over the past ten years, we have come across, stumbled upon, or have been given information about "new discoveries" in the field of Lithuanian numismatics. There are too many to mention here, but they have all been faithfully announced in **The Knight**.

The LNA could not be where it is today without the support of its members. We depend upon our readers for supplying us with information, articles, and research material. As we look forward to the future, I would like to see more articles submitted by LNA Lithuanian numismatics, and Lithuanian medieval medals. This has been one of our weak areas which needs to be strengthened.

The LNA is a numismatic **specialty** (not "splinter") group, and in our own little "niche" we have has a remarkable dent in the numismatic world. Interest (and prices...) in Lithuanian numismatic material has risen sharply as a result of our LNA. Lithuanian coins and currency are very hard to find now at coin shows. We know we have had something to do with that. There have been other specialty numismatic groups which have been organized, lasted a few years, and then folded. Not the LNA. We are still here 10 years later, and will continue to publish **The Knight**, as long as we have the support and participation of our members.

Ten years ago, we published a survey of our members, asking them to indicate their collecting interests and ideas about what they would like the LNA to be. We are enclosing a new survey with this issue, in which we'd like you to fill out and send in to our director, Robert Douchis, in order that we can determine the direction and future of the LNA/**The Knight**. All replies are confidential, and you don't even have to put your name on it, if you don't want to. But

we are doing this is order to keep in contact with our faithful members. We have received very few letters over the past couple of years, and wonder if we are meeting your needs or if you are getting bored; and if so, what can we do which will help. So please take time to fill out our survey, and please make some comments on the back.

In looking back over the past ten years, I am reminded of our original and still current purposes. We repeat them here:

1. To bring together collectors of Lithuanian money, whether coins or currency, ancient or modern, in a common organization;
2. To provide an avenue (**The Knight**) to share numismatic knowledge with one another;
3. To inform members and educate them in detailed information heretofore unavailable in the English language, especially in the field of Lithuanian numismatics;
4. To advance the knowledge of the history and peoples of the Baltic States, particularly in the field of numismatics.

And so, with those goals in mind, we begin our second decade of existence. We thank all of you have supported the LNA over the years, and we know you have, for we still have many of our original charter members with us. Special thanks to dealer Karl Stephens, who has supported us from the very beginning, and whose advertisements have been a regular part of **The Knight**.

A word about the mechanical arrangements. I write **The Knight**, while Robert Douchis acts as director and Secretary. He gets the paper printed from the copy-ready issue I send him, sends it out, and handles correspondences. This is all done volunteer and we both have put in many, many hours on LNA work. Bob has leaflets for signing up new members for the LNA. Write us for some and let's sign up some new members. This is OUR organization, and only together can we keep it going and flourishing.

Article Update, Continued to the present (2013):

Aleksandras Radzius took over the role of Director from Robert Douchis in the 1990s which involved printing and mailing our publication, and maintaining our membership rolls. His involvement meant I could spend more time researching and writing.

Beginning in 1988 rumblings occurred about Lithuania pushing for the reestablishment of its independence and also the revival of the Litas monetary system. We covered the latest news about this and brought it to our readership and to the general numismatic press here in the United States. This was picked up promptly by the national coin publications, particularly **Coin World** which featured the proposed coin models by Petras Garska on the front cover of one of its issues. Al Radzius did a great deal of translation work in order that we could present up-to-date

coverage of the numismatic happenings in Lithuania. Henry Gaidis provided us with articles about Lithuanian military orders and decorations.

It was exciting to produce an issue announcing Lithuania declaring the re-establishment of independence in 1990, followed by an "independence achieved" issue in 1991. Soon newspaper articles about the printing of the litas banknotes in the United States began appearing in the Lithuanian press, and we had these translated into the English language for our members to read. We also covered the issuance of the Talonas notes and their different series. Lithuanian numismatic books were also appearing, and other research material. We were becoming overwhelmed with new information as Lithuanian numismatics became alive and fresh. The Lithuanian Mint was reopened in 1992, this time in the capital city of Vilnius.

It was especially a joy to write the editor of **World Coin News** in its September 30, 1991 where I stated in a letters to the editor article entitled "Back under L." "We are enclosing a copy of your editorial from the October 13, 1981 issue of World Coin News, in which you state, "Should the day come that one or all of the Baltic States gains their independence, the staff of the Standard Catalog of World Coins will be more than eager to give them their separate listing." We are enclosing a copy of that editorial. Well, I have good news for you. Lithuania is now free and independent. And so is Latvia and Estonia. So I hope you will keep your word and now list these three countries under their respective country names in the Standard Catalog of World Coins. Your editorial was entitled, "Let's not ignore world realities. Soon these three Baltic countries will again be issuing their coins and currency. I have already received photographs of coin models and banknote designs. Our hobby specialty is alive and well." Lithuania was subsequently placed back under the "Ls" where it rightfully remains today in the SCWC.

At that point there was a big change of focus in **The Knight**. Instead of always writing about the past, we were bombarded with many new coins and banknotes issued by the Bank of Lithuania. The emphasis was on the present, as our hobby became alive again. It was hard to keep up as new commemorative coins, mint sets, banknotes and other materials were churned out on a quarterly basis. We found ourselves covering the numismatic news of Lithuania on a regular basis, and new numismatic articles written in Lithuania itself by collectors there. That was a refreshing development knowing that our hobby was alive, well, and blossoming back in Lithuania.

As mentioned previously through the years we held a small number of LNA club meetings at national numismatic conventions. Our most prominent one was held in Baltimore on August 2, 2003 in which our founding leaders and prominent members met together for a program held during the Convention of the American Numismatic Association. At that meeting Al Radzius presented us with the "Order of Lithuanian Numismatics" which had been designed by Al and struck for us by the Lithuanian Mint. That medal was announced in the September-October 2003 issue. Stanley Balzekas, Jr. was subsequently presented a medal later that year in Chicago.

During the 2000s I was able to do some specialty research and publish the results. This included the Pal-Waukee Airport (north of Chicago) patch included on the 2001 10 Litu banknote featuring Darius-Girenas (September-October 2002 issue); the existence of “doubled-die” 1936 10 litu coins (January-February, 2004 issue); and the burial place of Victor David Brenner, designer of the U.S. Lincoln Cent who was from Siauliai, Lithuania (January-February 2005 issue).

As time went on, more Lithuanian numismatic books were published. These included three books by LNA co-founder Robert J. Douchis along with Eugenijus Ivanauskas: “Coins of Lithuania 1386-1707” (1999), and “Lietuvos Monetu Kalybos Istorija 1495-1769” (2002), and “Pocket Catalogue of Lithuanian Coins 1386-1938.” (2004). Member Algirdas Kepalas translated the 1995 book “Money in Lithuania 1915-1941” by Ruta Kunciene into the English language, which we published in 1996.

Writing, researching, and layout of **The Knight** took a considerable amount of time each issue. With my increasing busy personal work schedule and other personal commitments, I found it increasingly difficult to devote the time necessary to carry on and reluctantly had to cut back my involvement. The death of co-founder Robert Douchis in 2005 was also a sad event. Vince Alones also passed away a few years ago.

During the final few years of **The Knight**, Al Radzius took over editing the publication, and much credit is due him for his valiant attempt to keep it going. In the end, we both were unable to find others to step in to assist us in the continuation of the publication, and our membership ranks were also dwindling.

The final issue, Volume 32 No. 3, appeared January-February 2010. There was no big announcement nor any indication that it was the last issue. The decision was made to silently let it cease publication.

In looking back, we feel we made a big difference in the perception of Lithuanian numismatics in the numismatic world. Because of our work, our specialty was no longer an obscure discipline back in a corner someplace or one that should be merged with neighboring countries. We brought Lithuanian numismatics and Lithuanian history to the forefront. It was an honor to meet many nice fellow collectors through the years, and we feel we made a positive mark in the education and science of Lithuanian numismatics.

We hope you will enjoy reading through these issues, as they contain much educational material. Special thanks to Dr. Audrius (Andy) Plioplys for his insight and action in making A digital version of **The Knight** available to future numismatists and researchers.

Sincerely,

--Frank Passic, Editor, **THE KNIGHT**, July 2013

Photos:



LNA meeting Baltimore, MD August 2, 2003: Front row: Aleksandras Radzius, Vincent Alones, Agnes Alones, Peter Shulin, Pauline (Kulikauskas) Passic. Back row: Anthony Tumonis, Robert J. Douchis, Frank Passic, Henry Gaidis, Len Harsel.

Frank Passic, meeting the Mayor of Lithuania, Vladas Butkus



Frank Passic wearing the Order of Lithuanian Numismatics



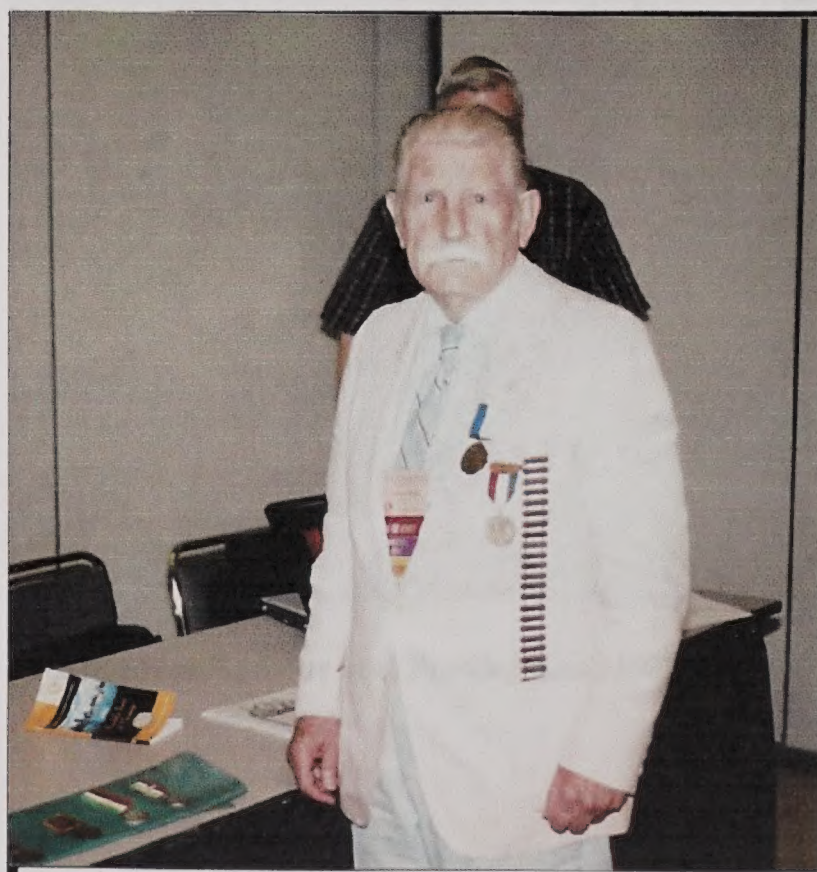
The Order of Lithuanian Numismatics, Obverse



The Order of Lithuanian Numismatics, Reverse



Henry L. Gaidis and Aleksandras Radzius, February 2003. 1997



Vincent W. Alones, August 2003



Vincent W. Alones and Douchis, 1985



Aleksandras Radzius and Frank Passic 1992



Stanley Balzekas, Jr. (RIGHT) receives the Medal of the Order of Lithuanian Numismatics from Frank Passic (LEFT). September, 2003 in the numismatic room at the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture.